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ABSTRACT

Four areas of consideration are crucial to the development of an effective English-as-a-Second-Language writing program: the nature of basic writers; acquisition of written language; approaches to teaching basic writing; and classroom strategies. Basic writers are students who have studied writing for years but are still unable to produce acceptable work. Problems are caused by lack of familiarity with specific grammatical and syntactic rules and the conventions of organization and logic required in academic writing. Analytical orientation and synthetic-holistic orientation seem to be only partially applicable in solving writing problems. Writing courses should cover linguistic conventions and appropriate writing procedures. Classroom activities should be focused on helping learners express themselves in their own ways. A set of 20 principles are outlined for writing instructors, including specific classroom techniques and areas for instructor awareness. Contains 24 references. (Author/MSE)

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Assisting Basic Writers: A Theoretical Framework and Classroom Strategies

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Four areas are crucial to the development of an effective ESL/EFL writing program: the nature of basic writers, acquisition of written language, approaches to teaching basic writing, and classroom strategies. Basic writers are students who have studied writing for years but are still unable to produce acceptable work. Problems are caused by lack of familiarity with specific grammatical and syntactical rules and the convention of organization and logic required in academic writing. Analytical orientation and synthetic-holistic orientation seems to be only partially applicable to solve writing problems. Writing courses should cover linguistic conventions and appropriate writing procedures. Classroom activities should be focused on helping learners express themselves in their own ways.

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INTRODUCTION

Basic writing has become an important subdiscipline in the field of rhetoric and composition. Since the mid-1970s, a body of seminal texts has emerged that provide teachers of writing with information on a great number of theoretical as well as classroom-based studies. Research in this field is continually being conducted. Such rapid development has definitely made basic writing as a field of study more informed than it has ever been. However, this positive development can also be confusing to novice teachers of writing who might find the vast amount of literature overwhelming and somewhat undigestible. This article will define basic writers and discuss their problems, explore theories about how written language is acquired and how writers write, explore the nature of writing and the various approaches

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to the teaching of basic writing, and synthesize the findings and formulate them into practical suggestions for classroom use.

BASIC WRITERS AND THEIR WRITING PROBLEMS

The term "basic writers" first appeared in print in 1976. It was used by Mina P. Shaughnessy to refer to those who were usually called "remedial", "developmental", "nontraditional", or "handicapped" students. While there is no single clear-cut definition of "basic writers", experts identify them by certain characteristics. For instance, Bizzell (1986) characterizes basic writers as those who are "least prepared for college" or as those who are faced with the greatest distance between their home dialects and the dialect preferred in English classes -- Standard English. Along the same line, Horning (1987) describes basic writers as college students in beginning composition courses who generally come from oral-based cultures and, in consequence, lack familiarity with both specific grammatical-syntactical rules and broader conventions of organization and logic required in academic English written discourse. According to Mayher's (1983), basic writers are students who have studied writing for years but are still unable to produce texts that are acceptable to the academic community. This writing problem, according to Farr and Daniels (1986), results primarily from basic writers' unfamiliarity with conventions of written discourse; it is not caused by their ignorance of linguistic rules.

In our observation, similar problems are common among in-coming international graduate students at Ohio State University, as evidenced by the great number of the graduate students enrolled in "basic writing" courses (e.g., English 100, 101). It is not difficult to imagine that the differences between such a student's linguistic and cultural background and experiences and those required in the academic community makes it hard for basic writers to "enter the community of academia." Depending on how far the linguistic distance between the mother tongue and Standard English, the cognitive process that basic writers have to go through in learning to write can be as complicated as the way other learners master a second or third language since, for most basic writers, academic written English represents a whole new language. Such a situation can produce frustration and even anxiety and fear among second language (L2) writers as they approach a remedial writing class (Mayher, 1983). This failure-ridden experience can push basic writers down even further and may, in turn, create a wider social

and psychological gap between speakers of the target language (Horning, 1987).

Research has shown that basic writers share a number of common writing problems. Perl (1980) has coined the phrase "writing deficiency" to characterize the problems L2 writers have in organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, accurately handling grammatical-structural features, and using correct punctuation and writing mechanics.

WRITTEN-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND PRODUCTION

In instructional practice, one's perception of how written language is acquired will in part determine one's choice of approaches to the teaching of writing. The approach one adopts, in turn, dictates, among other things, what will happen in the classroom and how student work will be evaluated.

Written-language Acquisition

Just as young children learn to speak and understand language when a surrounding speech community provides them with a purpose and and audience for their talk, an environment which provides a purpose and audience for writing is also essential for the development of writing ability (Mayher, 1983). In oral language acquisition, children use other people's speech to construct hypotheses about how different ideas are expressed in the language they are acquiring. Children use hearer responses as a guide to the effectiveness of their communication. Such a perspective is also relevant to written language acquisition (Freedman, 1985). If L2 writers employ similar hypothesis-testing strategies in learning written language, it follows that they need to know how proficient writers write as well as how their own readers understand and respond to their writing. This information is important to the L2 writers because it can confirm or disconfirm their hypotheses about how a piece of written discourse is produced. In other words, feedback, especially feedback provided by native-speakers, plays an important role in assisting the development of L2 writing.

Some researchers have argued that writers improve their abilities when they are given sufficient opportunities to express themselves in writing, to read aloud their work to trusted and supportive readers, to receive responses, and to revise their work to make their meanings clearer (Mayher, 1983; Ammon, 1985; Harris, 1986). Smith (1990) has theorized that development of

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learners' abilities in writing is closely related to their reading abilities as well as their willingness to use writing to construct and share meaning.

In sum, written-language acquisition will be facilitated if learners are afforded rich opportunities for exposure to, production of, and reflection on various types of discourse in the target language. Such activities must involve frequent writing on topics of personal interest, with caring guidance and supportive feedback being provided throughout the process (cf. Ammon in Freedman, 1985).

Writing Process

Through case studies employing retrospective techniques such as thinking aloud and protocol analysis, researchers have found that writers employ certain strategies when producing written discourse -- strategies that are not as simple and linear as the "planning-writing-revising" proponents used to think. For example, according to Zamel (cited in Nunan, 1989), the act of composing evolves through several stages as writers discover through the process what it is that they are trying to say. We still do not know how many components exactly are involved in the writing process and how they interrelate. However, according to Mayher (1983), the product of writers of all ages and levels of proficiency is essentially characterized by the following set of activities: percolating (i.e. everything that happens to the writer apart from the actual act of putting words onto paper), drafting, revising, editing, and "publishing." A current dominant theory posits that writing is a recursive process, occurring in no fixed sequence. Perl (1980) contends that the process is a series of movements forward ("projective structuring") where writers attend to shaping thoughts as they move along, making their meaning clear for their intended readers, and movements backward ("retrospective structuring") where writers shuttle back and forth from what they wanted to say to the words they have written and then back to their inward sense of their ideas.

Skilled versus Basic Writers

While, activity-wise, both experienced and inexperienced (or "basic") writers are generally the same, the quality of effort each puts into each of the writing stages is not necessarily identical. According to Richards (1990), research has consistently shown that there are significant differences in the procedures of skilled and basic writers. Perl (1980) and Zamel (cited in

Nunan, 1989; Krapels, 1990; and in Richards, 1990) has identified the following contrasts. In rehearsing and pre-writing phases (or "percolating"), skilled writers tend to spend a relatively great deal of time thinking about the writing task and planning how they will go about it. They also take time gathering data and organizaing information or "clustering". In contrast, basic writers generally spend little time on planning. In drafting and writing, skilled writers make use of information and data derived from the rehearsing phase to further trigger writing. They take time to let ideas develop, to get ideas onto paper fluently, and are primarily concerned with meanings at the discourse level. Basic writers tend to begin writing immediately, refer to the topic to trigger thoughts, spend little time reviewing what they have produced, and are mainly concerned with word choice and sentence formation. In revising, skilled writers work throughout the composing process to clarify meanings at all levels. Basic writers tend to make many formal changes -- changes which focus on small bits of the writing. Such revisions usually only involve the first draft and are made primarily in order to correct grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. According to Richards (1990), the use of more appropriate procedures makes successful writers produce better-quality writing. By the same token we can probably say that the use of inappropriate writing procedures makes basic writers produce typical "deficient writing." As suggested in Perl's (1980) observational study, even in the process of writing, basic writers are often insecure, frequently stopping themselves, constantly checking for grammatical-structural errors, and are uncertain as to the direction in which to head. This strategy causes basic writers to lose track of their thoughts and, as a result, their writing is often incoherent and disjointed.

THE NATURE OF WRITING AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING BASIC WRITING

Unlike the other linguistic macroskills, writing has been neglected for a long time. From the 1950s to the early 1960s, writing was considered to be secondary to speaking. In consequence, writing instruction served to reinforce speech in the sense that it emphasized mastery of grammatical and syntactic forms (Raimes, 1983). In the course of time, however, from a body of classroom research and numerous observations we learned that being able to speak a language does not necessarily indicate proficiency in writing. Writing, in other words, is not a natural extension of speaking. Many recent studies have also shown that cognitive processes involved in writing are qualitatively different from and more demanding than those involved in

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other skill areas (Canale, 1988). Writing is a set of decision-making processes involving intricate choices of grammar, syntax, mechanics, organization, word choice, purpose, audience, content, and the writing procedures (Raimes, 1983). Writing, in Mayher's (1983) words, is "language choice on paper." It is sending messages the writer cares to send to a receiver the writer hopes to influence (Simon, 1973). Writing, then, is a deliberate and purposeful activity.

Intricacies of the nature of writing and its relation to reading and other cultural factors affecting human behaviors and perceptions have led researchers and writing methodologists to different interpretations. These, in turn, have resulted in competing theories and speculations about how writing is supposed to be taught. Hood (in Moran & Jacobi, 1990), for example, has identified two orientations of basic writing instruction. One is an *analytic* orientation which assumes that writing can best be taught through divisions of discrete skills. From this perspective, basic writing instruction should focus on linguistic form, emphasize correctness, and use relative-complexity of grammatical-structural features as a basis for sequencing instructional materials and classroom activities. Perceiving English as a socializing discipline to help learners meet school demands of certification, the analytic approach tends to organize writing instruction according to one of the following patterns: (1) sentence, paragraph and essay writing, (2) rhetorical modes, sequenced from the concrete to the abstract, (3) hierarchy of cognitive skills, and (4) those covered in the first three, by dealing with word-sentence concerns and paragraph level of writing essays, research papers, and writing strategies.

A second orientations of basic writing instruction is *synthetic-holistic*. This orientation works on the assumption that writing can best be taught by having learners engage in the problem of content. From this perspective, the writing course should focus on ideas and organize instructional materials and writing activities to assist learners in mastering the conventions of academic discourse. Perceiving English as an individualizing discipline that promotes liberal learning and liberation, the synthetic-holistic approach is based on the assumptions that (1) language is acquired unconsciously rather than consciously learned; (2) reading is integral to writing-skill development; (3) writing should be based on the writer's own sense of meaning, communicative purpose, and social context; and (4) errors in writing should be seen as part of development and as a sign of progress.

As the synthetic-holistic orientation is translated into course designs (depending on the designer's inclination whether to perceive basic writing more as a cognitive-linguistic phenomena or as one of ideological concerns), the formats of basic-writing courses tend to fall into one of two categories. The first format stressed reading activities to enable learners to acquire the necessary language and academic-discourse conventions. The second format concentrates on learners' concerns about the social context in which they live. The first encourages learners to read (academic) texts and write personal responses to them, to consciously experience the writing process, and to perceive ,writing as a problem-solving procedure and mode of learning. The second, in contrast, is more concerned with writing activities that promote the raising of social conscious. It leads learners, through the development of reading and writing skills, to recognize links between their own lives and their society at large and to develop ways of using newly-acquired writing skills to intervene in their own environment. Since basic writers often have idiosyncratic problems in their writing (Moran & Jacobi, 1990), it is likely that each approach is only partially applicable (Kasden & Hoeber, 1980). It is therefore necessary that we select relevant elements of each approach (eclecticism) which can further be translated, adapted, and rearranged to fit the special needs of the target learners and the conditions of the school they attend.

SYNTHESIS FOR CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Given the fact that the production of written discourse requires lengthy and complex processes which are different from other linguistic skill areas, students need guidance as to how to generate, formulate, develop, and organize their ideas in a way that conforms to the written discourse conventions of the target language. This ensures that their ideas can fully be understood by their readers who naturally and unconsciously utilize "interpretive conventions" in understanding any piece of writing. In order to make such linguistic-rhetorical conventions and methods available and accessible to L2 writers, explicit instruction is imperative.

Writing courses should cover both "knowledge" (i.e. linguistic conventions as well as knowledge of the world) and "procedures" (i.e. appropriate writing strategies). More specifically, writing courses should attempt to cover five types of knowledge that are necessary for learner-writers: linguistic codes, conventions of genre, textual/linguistic dimensions, cultural knowledge and experiential knowledge.

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As suggested earlier, L2 students of writing should be enabled to control linguistic conventions (e.g., sentence structure, choice of words, spelling, punctuation) and discourse/genre conventions (e.g., specific writing formats) as well as taught how to organize and integrate their ideas in a coherent manner. All of this is a complex cognitive process requiring conscious efforts and intensive exercises.

Instructional Approach

As already mentioned, writing is language choice on paper. It is a personally engaging transaction through which writers makes connections and create their own meanings (Mayher et al., 1983). It involves the sending of those messages the writer wants to send to those receivers the writer chooses to address. In order for learners to work through the writing process (perhaps several times with the same piece of writing), there must be personal commitment to the writing. To ensure this, the writing process should serve the student-writers (Spandel, 1990). In other words, teachers must put learners in the central position as real writers -- as originators of meaning. Teachers should also give L2 students of writing more responsibility for topic selection and ensure that student interests and experiences are central to the learning process (Harris, 1986; Johnson in Tchudi, 1986; Spear, 1988; Rose, 1989). Teachers, as facilitators or partners, can create situations in which learner-writers find real reasons for writing and to do so in a manner which conforms to written-discourse conventions of the L2.

To facilitate learning and cognitive development on the part of learners, instructional materials (for writing activities) should be sequenced on the basis of the relative complexity of topics. For example, gradation could justifiably be made from "personal writing" (which is mainly related to the writers themselves and their personal reactions and feelings towards their immediate environment of people, places, and interests) to the types of writing that will likely be demanded in learners' social and academic lives. This later type would include the writing of summaries, various kinds of letters, academic essays and other data-based essays (Mayher, 1983; Spear, 1989; Rose, 1989).

Classroom Activities

Consistent with the idea that student-writers assume central roles in the writing process, all classroom activities should be focused on helping learners express themselves in ways that best suit them. Teachers need to ensure the existence of a stimulating classroom atmosphere, offer supportive feedback, and provide demonstrations in writing (Mayher et al., 1983).

Writing demonstration can take three different but interrelated forms: textual modeling, activity modeling, and behavior modeling. Textual modeling (i.e. provision of various formats) is important for learner-writers because it gives them a sense of direction with regard to which form (or forms) their piece of writing can take. Activity modeling, in which learners work collaboratively with their peers or with their teacher in one-to-one conference (i.e. in a community of writers), is a valuable technique to ensure that every student writer receive sufficient support and feedback. Behavior modeling, on the other hand, involves teacher demonstrates on how s/he deals with writing problems (as a writer among writers). This helps learners feel more secure as they can see for themselves that even their teachers have to go through a lengthy process and take great pains in writing. Models, in whatever form, should not be imposed on students as a prescribed formula. Instead, they should be offered as options for student-writers to consider. This same principle applies to the writing process or movements from one step of writing to another.

Evaluation of Student Writing

Contrary to the traditional view of assessment which tends to be teacher-directed and associated with final judgment in the form of grades, teachers of L2 writing should design assessment instruments and procedures that help learners improve their writing. Spandel and Stiggens (1990) suggest that assessment be made an integral part of the writing process and not as an afterthought; that students be taught to assess their own writing so that teachers and student-writers share assessment responsibility and learn from assessment results; that assessment results serve the full range of purposes in the classroom, from diagnosing student needs to grouping students for instruction, to evaluating instruction and, finally, to evaluating student performance.

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Care needs to be taken that assessment not interfere with the writing process. Teachers should ensure that some assessment, in the form of interim feedback, occurs prior to or apart from formal grading in order that students learn to write merely for the joy and satisfaction of writing. Teachers can capitalize on some of the comments made the writing process and use these comments, peer reviews, conference notes and revision comments as material for assessment of student writing. In deciding what aspects of writing to assess, teachers might solicit the involvement of learners by asking them what they, as readers, value in a good piece of writing. Evaluation guidelines, in the form of dynamic-inter-subjective criteria, can be developed based on such student input (Mayher et al., 1983).

Other researchers, like Elbow and Belanoff (in Graves, 1990), contend that the traditional "one-shot" examination and/or timed test cannot accurately reflect a learner's writing proficiency. Rather, a portfolio of each student's work should be evaluated. This would include at least two or three samples of a student writing in two or three genres at two or three different settings. Jay Simmons (1990) has pilot-tested this alternative assessment technique. She has come to the conclusion that self-selected portfolios of his/her best work are significantly better than timed tests in estimating a student's actual writing ability.

Can such as assessment procedure be applied in any classroom setting? According to Linda Rief (1990), in order for the portfolio concept to work in a classroom, learners should first of all be immersed in using the L2 through reading, writing, listening and speaking; they need to be given sufficient time to do so in large blocks; they must be given choices about what they are going to do, and they must receive positive response to their ideas.

Recommendations

The following 20 principles have been developed based on what has been discussed thus far. They are presented here as suggestions for writing instructors.

1) Be aware that learners bring considerable linguistic skills to the task of learning to write.

2) Work together with students to develop lists of possible topics for them to write about. Topics could revolve around the theme of sensory impressions (e.g. what smells/sounds they like/dislike), what makes them happy or sad, exciting moments they have experienced, school life, and such.

3) Provide learners with a rich variety of reading material and opportunities and encourage them to explore published literature and the work of peers and teachers.

4) Expose the learner-writers to models of writing in process and writers at work, including both teachers and classmates.

5) Provide students with opportunities to write for real on topics of personal significance and/or interest as well as to write purposefully (e.g. to express one's self, to communicate with others, to demonstrate something learned, to create, to learn, to master writing conventions).

6) Provide students with opportunities to experience writing for a wide range of audiences, both inside and outside of school. This will make student-writers aware of the need to adjust their discourse to the anticipated needs of the readers. Furthermore, it will impress students with the need to edit and revise their writing based on the target audience.

7) Encourage learner-writers to write regularly. This will build familiarity and confidence which, in turn, will lead to relatively fluent written production.

8) Assist students in developing their writing fluency by giving them opportunities to have one-on-one conferences with the teacher.

9) Support students with empowering feedback – feedback that encourages them to consciously identify and solve their composing problems; feedback that stimulates practice and encourages them to transfer their skills to new writing projects.

10) Provide opportunities for students to keep journals, including an informal listing of ideas, personal thoughts, opinions and responses to almost anything that affects their lives.

11) Encourage students to exchange journals with fellow learners to allow for enrichment of insights and topics for writing.

12) Direct instruction in specific strategies and techniques for writing so that, from time to time, student writing repertoires will enlarge.

13) Teach writing mechanics and grammatical conventions in the context of actual student composition when they actually need such conventions. In dealing with errors, focus first of all on sets or pattern of related errors.

14) In every (new) writing session, allow 10 to 15 minutes for written warming-up exercises, these to serve as a springboard for topics selection and ideas development.

15) Demonstrate how you personally deal with a writing assignment. Encourage students, as readers, to contribute ideas to your writing.

16) Provide opportunities for students to write as many drafts as necessary for them to discover what they want to say. Encourage them to

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try any form of writing which may help them discover and transmit their intended message.

17) Set a model for students on how to revise a piece of writing. Encourage students to position themselves as audience or readers.

18) Occassionally, invite a colleague to demonstrate how s/he reacts to your writing and how s/he provides constructive criticism and makes suggestions for revision. Display the revision process to the whole class.

19) Make sure that students understand what revising means by providing opportunities for them to work as editors in small groups.

20) In grading papers, be flexible and use cumulative evaluation of student writing that stresses revision and is sensitive to variations in subjects, audiences, and purposes. Allow students to select their best work for you to grade. Consider their individual progress from time to time to enable you to be fair in assigning grades.

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A Correlative Study between Creative Sentence Combining Ability and Syntactic Maturity in Free Writing among Students of Akaba 17, Semarang

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It is known that the more advanced the ESL/EFL student, the greater the quality and complexity of his/her writing. Research in the United States has shown that one of the factors which contribes to syntactic maturity in free writing is controlled practise in sentence combining. In Indonesia, where sentence combining has long been a popular approach to the teaching of writing, no such correlation has been determined. This present study seeks to establish this relationship for EFL students in Indonesia based on 90 EFL subjects from AKABA 17, Semarang. Results of a 5-step statistical analysis of the data confirm the findings of American researchers: the quality and syntactic complexity of the free writing of AKABA 17 EFL students also correlates significantly with practise in controlled sentence combing. The same data was also used to seek and answer to a secondary research question: how does the free writing syntactic maturity of AKABA 17 EFL students compare with the same for native-speakers of English. Analysis showed that the syntactic quality and complexity of the free writing of the AKABA 17 subjects was inferior to that of their native-speaker counterparts. It was determined that second year AKABA 17 students were writing at a syntactic level somewhere between Grade 6 and Grade 8 of native-speaker school children. The author concludes with a recommendation on the applicability of these findings to the teaching of writing at AKABA 17. He also suggests 2 types of follow-up (experimental) research to further support the present study's findings.

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